

# Connecting Maine to Global Markets

Annual Report 2023



Maine International  
Trade Center

# What Trade Means for Maine

About 2,000 Maine companies exported over \$3.3 billion in goods and services to 187 markets last year.

84% of Maine exporters are small- and medium-sized businesses.

International trade supports 1 in 5 (170,300) Maine jobs.

Among international employers, companies from the Netherlands, Canada, and the United Kingdom support the largest number of Maine jobs.

Foreign-owned companies are important customers for local goods and services and employ 37,300 Maine workers.

*Sources: US Census Bureau, "How Maine's Economy Benefits from International Trade & Investment" from Business Roundtable, and "Investing in America" from Global Business Alliance*

## Our Role

Maine International Trade Center (MITC) is Maine's leading source for international business assistance. MITC offers customized consulting, research, and an extensive network of connections across Maine and around the world to help businesses expand global markets for their products and services.

A public-private partnership, MITC activities are supported by nearly 300 businesses and organizations, corporate sponsors, and the Maine Department of Economic & Community Development (DECD). MITC members include manufacturers, service providers, and educational institutions located in all 16 Maine counties. While our members support the organization through annual membership dues, MITC provides assistance to any Maine business whether members or non-members. We work with both exporters and importers.

## Key Partners



U.S. Small Business Administration



# President's Letter

Dear MITC Members and Friends:

In 1996, MITC was formed with a mission to “enhance the competitive advantage of state businesses desiring to compete in the international market.” What that looked like in 1996 – a suite of services which was almost exclusively dedicated to export development using 1980s hand-me-down technology no less! – was another world than the one we live in today.

From those humble beginnings, I'm proud to see what this organization has been able to achieve. Through a wide range of prosperous and challenging times, MITC has not just survived but thrived and continues to evolve to meet our dynamic mission of connecting Maine to global markets.

We haven't done it alone. Our success depends on the success of Maine companies doing business in markets around the globe, which in turn supports jobs in Maine and strengthens the state's economy.

During 2023, MITC intentionally worked to **strengthen collaborations** with long-standing partner organizations to better benefit the state, Maine's international business community, and individual companies. As a statewide organization, last year also brought a **renewed focus on rural engagement** for economic development to connect more companies outside of the Greater Portland area with new opportunities for growth, whether domestically through the new DTEP funding program or overseas through participation in the Finland forestry mission or international conferences. The highlights included in this year's annual report provide examples of our progress toward these two overarching goals.

Lastly, MITC welcomed two staff in 2023 with **Dan Berger** and **Marty Hamre** who bring new experience, ideas, and strategies to the North Atlantic and business development areas.

Thank you, as always, for your support of MITC, our community, and our mission.

All the best for 2024,



Wade Merritt  
Maine International Trade Center President  
and State Director of International Trade





# Helping Maine Small Businesses Grow

## One-on-One Assistance

Our team is dedicated to helping Maine companies succeed in global markets. MITC's trade specialists meet businesses wherever they are in their international business development phase to provide customized information, guidance, and referrals.

**380**  
Maine organizations  
in 16 counties  
assisted in 2023

During a typical month in 2023, MITC received 8-16 requests for assistance from Maine companies and organizations.

Last year overall, MITC provided one-on-one assistance to 380 Maine companies in all 16 counties through in-person or virtual meetings, phone calls, emails, and research to respond to requests received for assistance.

### Trade Assistance Requests

#### Top Countries

Australia, Canada, China, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Mexico, and the United Kingdom

#### Frequent Topics

Distributors & Partners  
Export Documentation  
Export Controls & Regulations  
Contact & Referral Requests  
Business Development Grants  
Logistics & Shipping  
Tariffs & Taxes  
Trade Shows  
Trade Statistics

## ExporTech Maine

In partnership with the US Commercial Service, Maine Manufacturing Extension Partnership, and the Small Business Administration – Maine District, MITC hosted **ExporTech Maine** from February through May 2023 with a cohort of five Maine companies from the consumer goods, defense, and forest products sectors. This 10-week national export assistance program applies a structured export strategy development process to help companies enter or expand in global markets. Many companies generate export sales within 6 months of completing the program.

*"MITC and ExporTech have been invaluable for North Spore in navigating the world of export compliance. Their expertise and guidance have been instrumental in ensuring our business meets all the necessary regulations and requirements for international trade. . . We highly recommend MITC and ExporTech to any business seeking assistance with export compliance – both their professionalism and dedication are truly commendable."*

*Patrick Lyons, Sales Manager, North Spore (Portland, ME)*

Participants were introduced to 15+ guest coaches, and the MITC team provided technical assistance and market research. Each company developed an export strategy to access identified markets ranging from North America and Europe to the Middle East with a plan to leverage state and federal resources.



## Financial Assistance for Small Business Growth

During 2023, a total of 31 Maine small businesses in 9 counties were approved for projects to grow export sales in international markets with **STEP Financial Assistance Awards**. With a total of \$16 million in projected sales for the next 12-18 months, these projects generated a 145:1 projected ROI for funds awarded last year.

**\$16 million**  
in projected sales  
for the next  
12-18 months

In September, MITC received an additional \$350,000 in federal money from the US Small Business Administration to continue funding under this program for two more years.

*"MITC's STEP grant support over the years has been a critical component of our development in a growing global industry, helping Maine to stay at the forefront of biotech and a robust and healthy aquaculture economy."*

*William Keleher, President/CEO, Kennebec River Biosciences (Richmond, ME)*

Growing domestic sales – through investing in market analysis, selection, and entry methods – serves as a springboard for future success in international markets.

New in 2023, MITC launched the **Maine Domestic Trade Expansion Program (DTEP)** to provide financial support for Maine small businesses to diversify and grow markets within the United States.

Funded by the Maine Jobs & Recovery Plan (MJRP) through a contract with the Maine Department of Economic & Community Development (DECD), companies from the following three industry sectors were eligible: Aerospace & Defense, Food & Beverage, and Offshore Wind & Renewables.

Growing domestic sales – through investing in market analysis, selection, and entry methods – serves as a springboard for future success in international markets. Last year, 20 Maine small businesses in 10 counties completed projects using DTEP funding with more than \$6.6 million in projected sales for the next 12-18 months.

**more than  
\$6.6 million**  
in projected sales  
for the next  
12-18 months

*"Your organization is helping grow our business. This research will strengthen our brand as we compete with hundreds of other companies. We're better positioned to win, and we're all very grateful for this generous grant."*

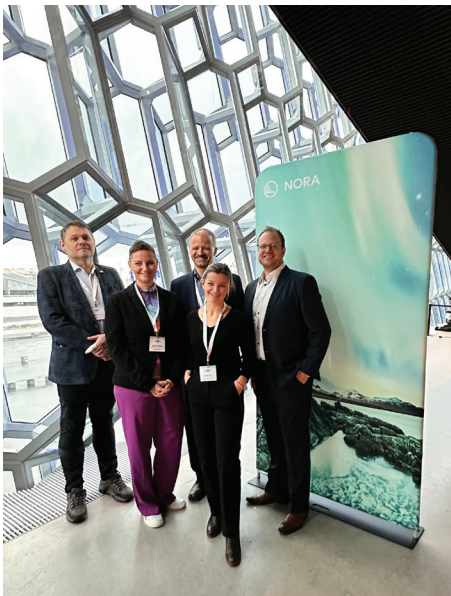
*Mark Ozimek, VP Marketing & Innovation, Scott & Jon's (Auburn, ME)*

# North Atlantic Spotlight

In conjunction with the Office of Business Development at the Maine Department of Economic & Community Development and the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry, MITC coordinated a **Trade and Study Mission to Finland** in May. Focused on forest bioeconomy and mass timber, the mission included 14 representatives from Maine business, academia, and government, and resulted in new ideas, leads, and connections to support the exciting evolution of the forest products industry.

MITC staff attended the **2023 Arctic Circle Assembly** in Reykjavik, Iceland in October alongside over 40 Mainers from various organizations. As the largest annual international gathering on the Arctic, the event gathers prestigious leaders in government, business, and academia from 60+ countries. MITC rekindled connections with governmental and commercial entities throughout the North Atlantic and held 16 introductory and collaboration meetings.

Our team focused on sourcing opportunities for Maine businesses in clean tech, offshore wind, aquaculture, and logistics during the conference, as well as side meetings with key stakeholders. In addition, Maine Port Authority (MPA) and MITC engaged in a strategic executive meeting with Eimskip HQ in Reykjavik, discussing a decade of partnership, port improvements, and collaborative plans for 2024.





# Conferences, Events, and Trade Shows

In May, MITC held our signature annual event **Maine International Trade Day** with a total of 294 attendees at the virtual panel session and in-person networking reception/annual awards ceremony. The theme for Trade Day 2023 was “Maine on the World Stage: Celebrating Innovation and Opportunities” and speakers highlighted the state as a global leader in several key sectors such as renewables, blue and forest bioeconomy, and new space. Maine Governor Janet Mills delivered the Keynote Presentation during the award ceremony to honor our 2023 annual award winners: North American Kelp, Libellula, Fox Forestry, Dirigo Strategies, Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative, and Keegan Stanton-Meas.





MITC collaborated with colleagues at Maine Department of Economic and Community Development, Maine Technology Institute, and Maine Office of Tourism to represent the State of Maine as a top sponsor at **Seagrass USA 2023** in September in Portland.

The return of the international conference to Maine attracted almost 300 participants from 18 countries and 16 states, representing 185 companies and institutions. New coordinated marketing messaging for the State of Maine was developed for conference promotional materials including pull-up banners, flyers, social media graphics, and postcards. Earned media efforts resulted in coverage with stories airing on local, national (CNBC), and international (CNBC Asia) media outlets. The clear message that “Maine is a leader in the seaweed industry” was delivered as a result of this strategic collaboration, which could well serve as a model for other industry sectors in the future.



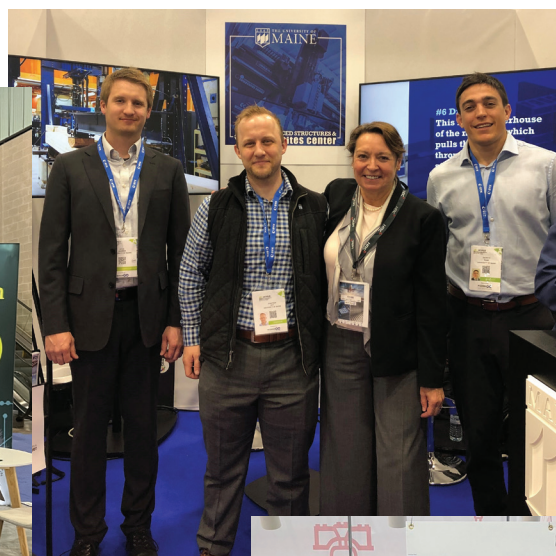
During the **AFloat – American Floating Offshore Wind Technical Summit** in Portland in September, MITC organized two international business roundtable luncheons for 11 Maine companies. In coordination with the UK Department for Business and Trade, Maine companies had an opportunity to hear directly from UK companies on the first day about challenges and opportunities in offshore wind.

On the second day, Maine companies met with representatives from Innovation Norway, Norwegian Offshore Wind, the Norwegian Embassy, and Norwegian businesses. With sales and partnerships already established in this market, Maine is poised to build on trade and investment opportunities in the future. Discussion topics included supply chain, ports, energy transition, fisheries, and aquaculture.





In November, MITC sponsored and participated in the inaugural **Maine Space Conference**, part of the Maine Space 2030 initiative. The conference attracted 300 Mainers, visitors from throughout the US, and several international guests. The two MITC-sponsored panel sessions spotlighted Maine businesses in the aerospace industry including Hunting Dearborn, Tex Tech Industries, Spirit Aerosystems, and Giuseppe Space, among others. Topics covered included enabling career pivots to new industries, considering which voices are being included in space development, and integrating industry with academia to address talent attraction. Maine's geographic location offers exciting possibilities for future foreign direct investment (FDI) and new opportunities for Maine companies.



### **Additional 2023 Conference and Expo Participation Included:**

**ACP Offshore WINDPOWER Conference and Expo (Boston, MA)**

**BIO International Convention (Boston, MA)**

**Collision Conference (Toronto, Canada)**

**JEC World (Paris, France)**

**IDEX and NAVDEX (Abu Dhabi, UAE)**

**MEDICA (Düsseldorf, Germany)**



# Future Global Leaders Internship Program

Maine's future success depends on a global workforce. For over 25 years, MITC has hosted and trained over 200 college students and recent graduates in our paid, part-time **Future Global Leaders (FGL) internship program**.

MITC interns provide research assistance directly to Maine businesses under the supervision of the MITC team. The program offers students an unparalleled opportunity to gain international business skills, develop specific professional competencies, and consider pathways for themselves as young professionals in Maine.



In 2023, key partners for the FGL program included: Dirigo Labs (Waterville, ME), Eastern Maine Development Corporation (Bangor, ME), the Bowdoin, Bates, & Colby College joint career services initiative, and the University of Southern Maine (Maine Economic Improvement Fund). These partners helped to promote the program, provided space for interns to work outside of Portland, and co-facilitated new experiential learning initiatives.

Last year, a total of 28 applications (more than double from the previous year) for internship spots were received, and 10 interns were hosted representing Bowdoin College, Colby College, University of Maine, University of Maine School of Policy and International Affairs (SPIA) and School of Business, and University of Southern Maine.





“My experience at MITC has been fantastic. It has truly been a wonderful organization with a very friendly and welcoming team, astounding leaders, and a very cooperative environment overall. I have learned so much about the state of Maine’s international business front, and the many industries that are crucial to Maine. Being a Future Global Leader has provided many opportunities to develop my professional abilities, such as project management and market research, and also recognizing important skills that will be conducive to any professional environment I find myself in. I am extremely grateful.”

*Jose Mota, former MITC Research Assistant 2023, Bowdoin College*

Last year, MITC developed shared intern pilot programs in collaboration with Eastern Maine Development Corporation (EMDC) and Central Maine Growth Council (CMGC).

Inspired by crossover between MITC’s objective to increase engagement with Maine companies in rural counties and EMDC’s Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, a temporary summer Technical Assistance Liaison position was created with responsibility for identifying opportunities to interweave MITC resources and the Economic Recovery Implementation Regional Hub project in Penobscot County and Eastern Maine (focused on 6 of 7 distressed Maine counties). The shared position was filled by a previous MITC intern (a recent Husson University MBA graduate and Caribou native). In July, EMDC hired the young professional to serve as full-time Program Manager for EMDC’s Eastern Maine Economic Recovery Implementation Hub.

The success of the EMDC pilot project led to a similar partnership with CMGC in late 2023. In collaboration with Dirigo Labs, a MITC intern spent a semester working one day per week in the Bricks Coworking and Innovation Space in Waterville to explore ways to better integrate MITC services for their startup accelerator companies. Today’s startups are thinking globally – both in terms of competition and opportunity – right out of the gate, and MITC has a key role to play as a partner in Maine’s growing accelerator and entrepreneurial ecosystem.



“The work is rewarding, nuanced, and full of opportunities for personal interest and professional development. There are so many possibilities for independent learning and ownership over the role as an intern. All of this is made possible through the support offered by the amazing team at MITC. Not only are the people talented at what they do, they put unparalleled involvement and care into the intern program. MITC’s FGL program truly allows for interns to make the experience their own. I am leaving my internship more connected to the state (and my interests) and grateful for MITC’s guidance into the professional I am becoming.”

*Eliza Bratone, former MITC Research Assistant, 2023, Colby College*

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Director, Maine North Atlantic Development  
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**Patty Davis**  
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**Abigail Gray**  
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*(Seated, from left) Abigail Gray, Wade Merritt, and Marty Hamre;  
(Standing, from left) Maria McIntyre, Hillman Norberg,  
Cheryl Rau, Dan Berger, and Patty Davis  
(Missing from photo) Adrian Horn and Zeynep Turk*  
PHOTO CREDIT: WOHLER & CO.



Maine International  
Trade Center

2 Portland Fish Pier, Suite 204  
Portland, ME 04101

+1 207-541-7400  
[info@mitc.com](mailto:info@mitc.com)

[www.mitc.com](http://www.mitc.com)